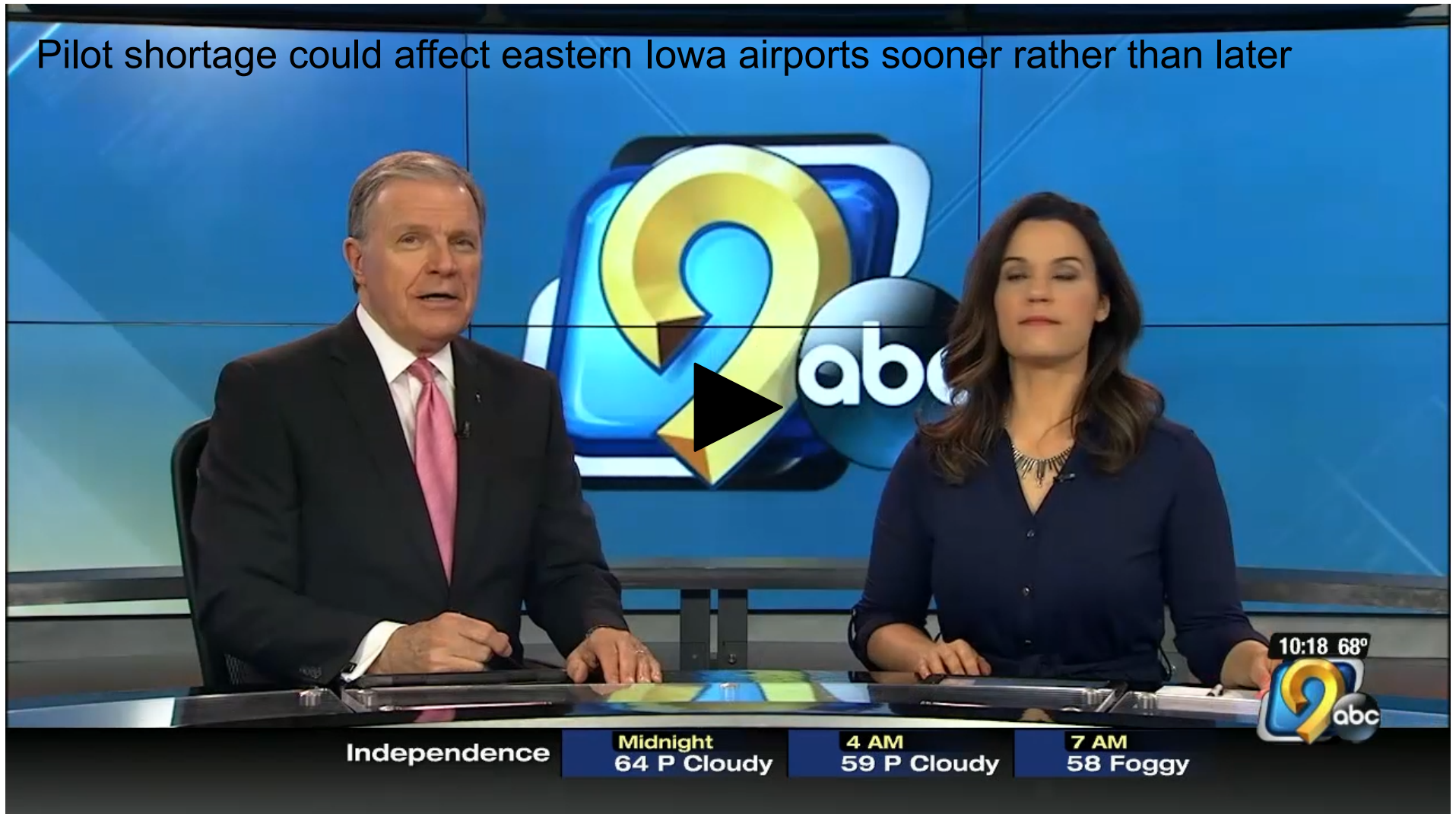


Pilot shortage could affect eastern Iowa airports sooner rather than later



By Aaron Scheinblum, KCRG-TV9 | Posted: Wed 7:42 PM, Aug 01, 2018 | Updated: Wed 11:31 PM, Aug 01, 2018

DUBUQUE, Iowa (KCRG-TV9) -- A new study shows the demand for pilots will increase drastically- with a desperate need to fill those spots.

Boeing released its 2018 Pilot and Technician Outlook- showing the demand over the next 20 years will reach 790,000 pilots worldwide. 635,000 pilots are needed for commercial airlines, like American Airlines or Delta Airlines- and 206,000 of those pilots are needed in North America.



Staff members at the Dubuque Regional Airport and Eastern Iowa Airport in Cedar Rapids say this problem could affect us here in Eastern Iowa sooner rather than later.

79-percent of the airline service here in Iowa is on a regional airline. According to Marty Lenss, Airport Director at Eastern Iowa Airport, projections show by 2020, the total number of pilots needed nationwide will exactly equal the entire Regional Airline Association pilot workforce.

Imagine booking a flight, then finding out there is no pilot to fly the plane.

The Dubuque Regional Airport serves hundreds of travelers every day- growing more than 20-percent in passenger traffic since 2013. But without pilots, those planes cannot fly.

"We produce more pilots in the world than any other country- and now we're lagging behind," said Robert Grierson, the Dubuque Regional Airport Manager. "The airlines can't fill their classes. So it is a problem."

Grierson said the issue is not in a lack of interest in traveling eastern Iowa, but a lack of interest in people becoming a pilot.

"[Airlines] view Dubuque as being a profitable, good run for them," Grierson said. "They want to continue flying Dubuque and they told me flat out- as long as we can continue to keep putting people in the airplanes, they're going to continue to operate here."

The Dubuque Regional Airport has three commercial departures and arrivals every single day, to and from Chicago. The pilot shortage has not necessarily kept them from getting those flights in and out, but it has already kept them from expanding.

"They've looked me straight in the eye and said: 'we'd love to expand... but we don't have the pilots,'" Grierson recalled.

Another concern, Grierson said, is the need for pilots in the U.S. Military.

"The Air Force today has reported they're 2,000 pilots short- right now," Grierson said. "The Navy's reporting a shortage of pilots."

Grierson added one of the biggest hurdles has come from Congress- after legislation in 2009.

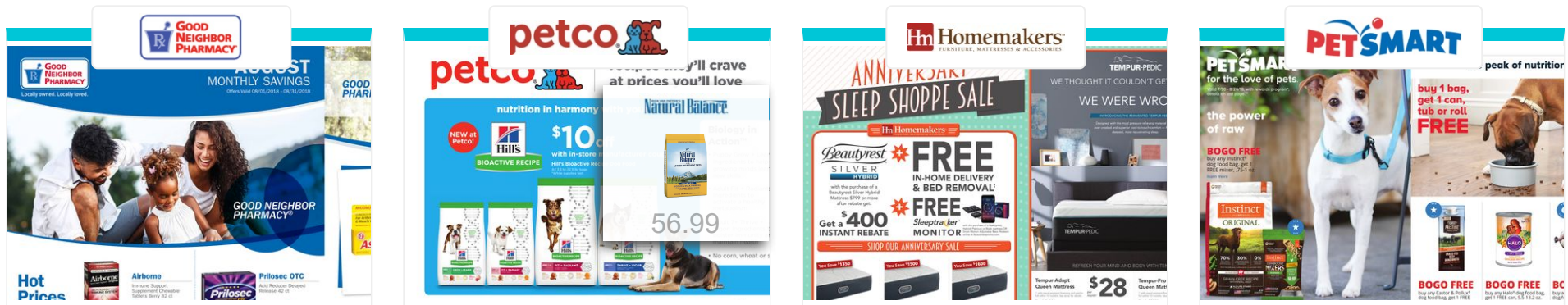
"The baby boom was already starting to retire as pilots, the military was not cranking out pilots like we were during Vietnam," Grierson said. "They recognized we had a pilot shortage looming, and then they said: 'now we're going to make it even tougher to become a commercial airline pilot.' To become a first officer on a regional carrier, where it once took 250 flight hours just to get a job interview, now it takes 1,500 flight hours."

The 1,500 flight hour rule went into effect in 2013. The FAA says this came in direct response to a fatal plane crash in 2009- Colgan Air flight 3407. An investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board concluded the probable cause was "the captain's inappropriate response... which led to an aerodynamic stall from which the airplane did not recover." All 49 passengers died in the crash.

Only feet from the terminal, the University of Dubuque's aviation school is stepping into try and fill the demand. Students like Matt Prem know exists.

"It will impact the corporate aviation side," Prem said. "I think that airlines are going to be scooping them up faster than smaller businesses or companies will be able to get them in."

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Prem already has his pilot's license, but transferred to the University of Dubuque to get his commercial license- a dream he is close to having come true.

"There's a high demand, everybody knows that," Prem said. "And it pays very well."

Grierson echoed Prem, saying the pay for pilot positions is reaching new highs, saying he commends the University of Dubuque for recruiting new talent.

"They are just doing what they can to crank out the pilots to fill the need," Grierson said.

A need for pilots- turning those in the industry into advocates for the future.

"This is a career opportunity for people and it's a fun job," Grierson said. "The opportunities are out there."

Grierson said the biggest challenge is getting kids interested in flying at an early age. He said it is one of the reasons the airport recently added an observation deck, as well as hosting open houses to spark more interest in people becoming pilots.